United Nations E/CN.6/2006/NGO/17

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fiftieth session
27 February-10 March 2006
Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Human Rights Advocates, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2006/1.

06-21882 (E) 070206

Statement

1. The Commission on the Status of Women will consider two thematic issues at its fiftieth session this year: the enhanced participation of women in development and the equal participation of women in decision-making processes.

2. This written statement emphasizes the need to enhance the role of women in development and to continue the efforts to decrease trafficking in persons and address the role of military demand in trafficking. It also emphasizes the need to increase the political participation of women in order to achieve the ultimate purpose of gender equality and the advancement of women.

Enhanced participation of women in development to combat trafficking in persons

3. Trafficking in persons is a modern day form of slavery and a gross violation of the human dignity of trafficking victims. An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 persons are trafficked across international borders each year, the majority of which are women and children.

4. The growth and development of the transnational crime of trafficking in persons is fueled by globalization and governed by supply and demand forces operating in countries of origin and destination countries. These forces provide traffickers with a vulnerable population of victims in source countries and a market for cheap labor in destination countries. The root causes of trafficking in source countries include development processes that marginalize women from education and employment, gendered cultural practices, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence in families and communities. This creates a climate where women are vulnerable to promises of employment and opportunity made by traffickers.

5. Women are marginalized from employment when development strategies founded upon existing gendered divisions of labor preclude women from the opportunity to work in traditionally male occupations. This limits employment opportunities for women and creates a system where women who are economically dependent on men and become vulnerable to traffickers if that economic support is withdrawn.

6. The denial of access to education also marginalizes women. Poverty and gendered cultural practices are among many factors that contribute to the lack of educational opportunities available for women and girls. A disproportionate number of girls drop out of school early to bolster their family income by working in or outside the home. These girls are prevented from gaining necessary job skills for better employment as adults.

7. Education is also an effective anti-trafficking measure. Though not a complete solution, it raises awareness on the dangers of trafficking, including methods used by traffickers and consequences upon victims. When combined with development strategies, education can facilitate real employment alternatives for women in source countries.

8. Trafficking also hinders development because the organized crime rings that tend to facilitate trafficking undermine the growth of transparent local markets. Trafficking in persons leads to depressed economies and hinders development when victims are left without a means to pursue diverse economic and educational opportunities.

9. Trafficking in persons is a serious transnational crime and a gross violation of the human rights of trafficking victims, and its eradication should be a foremost goal of the international community. Programs designed to prevent trafficking in persons should acknowledge that the marginalization of women is a root cause of trafficking. Measures to increase access to education and employment opportunities must be recognized as a vital component of any program to combat trafficking in source countries.

Military demand of trafficking and the role of Security Council Resolution 1325

10. The global problem of human trafficking persists despite vigorous efforts in the international human rights community to deter the practice. Initial difficulties in arriving at a consensus definition of "trafficking" have slowed the collaborative effort in the prevention of trafficking. In addition, the lack of governmental and institutional stability that persists in regions of armed conflict aid the proliferation of trafficking without impunity for those who both arrange the trafficking of women and girls and those who stimulate the demand for trafficking, including military presences.

11. The United Nations plays a role in the complex global network of trafficking. Recent reports evidence that UN Peacekeepers are among the military presences responsible for contributing to the demand for global trafficking. This renders trafficking increasingly difficult to diminish due to the countervailing growth of demand created by various military presences in regions of armed conflict. Troops dispatched with the intention of maintaining peace in destabilized regions now contribute to the peripheral consequence of increasing the demand for the trafficking of sex workers.

12. Trafficking where soldiers are stationed destabilizes regions by increasing crime, as women and girls are usually brought into these areas by organized crime rings. This undermines the legitimacy and efficacy of the UN peacekeeping operations in the vulnerable regions that are in critical need of UN protection.

13. Moreover, UN Security Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325) urges member states to remain actively involved in recognizing the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and more specifically, to provide effective institutional arrangements to guarantee the protection of women and girls in situations of armed conflicts. By extension, the intentions of SCR 1325 must be honored and extended to protect the women and girls that are harmed by the UN peacekeepers who contribute to the demand for trafficking in situations of armed conflict.

14. It is urged that the Security Council, member states, and United Nations entities continue to take all necessary measures implement the recommendations in SCR 1325 including to apply increased pressure to parties to armed conflict to cease all violations of the human rights of women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violations, and to conduct gender-sensitive investigations and report findings systematically to the Council on the role of the military in increasing the demand for trafficking.

Equal participation of women in decision-making processes

15. Equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels is a "sine qua non" condition for a functioning democracy. Democratic governments should continue to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making processes in order to strengthen and legitimize their regimes.

16. Despite significant progress since the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, women are still not sufficiently involved in decision-making processes. A 187-country survey carried out by Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2005 indicates that the world average of women represented in national parliaments is 16.1%. Only 18 countries attained the critical mass of at least 30 per cent, which is believed to be the minimum size necessary for influence in decision-making processes.

17. Many countries adopted "positive discrimination" policies in order to eliminate the traditionally applied discrimination against women in almost all aspects of the political process. Among these is the establishment of quota systems and/or reserved seats in local and national elections, one of the most effective vehicles to be considered as "temporary special measures" within the scope of Article 4(1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which aims at accelerating de facto equality between men and women. To date, 81 nations include provisions in their constitutions, elections laws, or in political parties, which seek to enhance women's political participation at the local or national levels.

18. Uganda established a quota system in national elections which increased female representation in Parliament from 1% in 1987 to a high of 18% in 2000. South Africa also established quotas for political parties which increased representation from 2% in 30% in the same period. Alternatively, countries that abolished quota systems witnessed a dramatic decline in female representation in their national parliaments, including Albania, Hungary and Romania.

19. Candidate quotas are especially important in societies in which patriarchal values remain firmly entrenched. Patriarchal values threaten not only women vying for political seats but the civil and political rights of the general female population in such societies. Allowing greater female representation benefits not only the women vying for the political seats but also the broader female population that stands to gain from having female political representation.

20. Ensuring equal participation in decision-making processes means much more than simply increasing the number of women elected. The number of women in public and private spheres, including high-level government positions and executive leadership position needs to increase as well. Broad social changes in the way women's position in social and political life are viewed will take time. However, governments should lead this effort in concert with national and international non-governmental organizations and the media in order to accelerate the transformation and promote the global struggle for women's equality.

Recommendations

21. To achieve the ultimate goal of gender equality and the advancement of women, all necessary measures must be taken to enhance participation of women in development and increase their roles in decision-making processes. To combat trafficking in persons and the military demand for trafficking, women's access to education and employment opportunities must be increased and efforts made to prevent human rights violations against women, with particular emphasis on regions of armed conflict. Additionally, countries must take steps, including those for training and accountability, to recognize and address the demand created for trafficked persons by their own military forces. To further women's political participation, systems must be established for ensuring seats for women in local and national elections.